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Chairman: Mr. de Rojas ..... (Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 97: Sustainable development and international economic cooperation (*continued*)
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(f) First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (*continued*) (A/52/413, A/52/573, E/CN.5/1997/8 (Part II))

1. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It also endorsed the observation made in the *Human Development Report 1997* that eradicating poverty was more than a moral imperative, but a practical possibility, because the necessary resources and know-how already existed to created a poverty-free world in less than a generation. The first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty provided a suitable time-frame for measured advances towards the goal of poverty eradication, but a more determined, action-oriented approach was needed in order to make meaningful progress. It might be possible to agree that absolute poverty would be halved by the year 2015 and to deploy the means necessary to reach that objective.

2. Although poverty eradication was primarily the responsibility of national Governments, it was a multi-faceted undertaking requiring complementary actions at the national and international levels and involving all segments of society, based on a sound understanding of individual circumstances. Sustained economic growth and employment creation remained crucial elements of any strategy. Guyana had mounted a campaign to reduce the numbers of its population living below the poverty line, for which clear objectives had been set. As an input into the process, his Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had recently published the first Human Development Report for Guyana, which contained an assessment of poverty in the country. The national development strategy would provide the framework for an action plan for poverty alleviation. Regrettably, his country's efforts had been severely constrained by an onerous debt burden and by the negative effects of structural adjustment, on the social sector in particular. Notwithstanding those constraints, the Government had demonstrated its commitment to poverty eradication by increasing allocations to the social sector, especially health care and education, without compromising its commitment to macroeconomic stabilization and structural reform.

3. He reiterated that domestic efforts to combat poverty must be complemented by an enabling international environment. The impact of globalization and trade liberalization on poverty was yet to be fully assessed, but some indications gave cause for concern. In addition, persistent domestic resource constraints pointed to the need for increased resource mobilization, both nationally and internationally. Commitments of official development assistance should be honoured and debt-relief agreements, including the recent highly-indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, should be implemented in an expeditious and flexible manner. The continued support of the United Nations system and the international community would be required to assist developing countries, particularly the least-developed countries and low-income countries, in their efforts to translate plans and strategies into socio-economic gains for the people.

4. **Mr. Carney** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, founded almost 900 years earlier, was the oldest institution in the world established for the purpose of helping the poor. Article 2 of its Constitutive Charter stated that the Order performed works of charity, especially providing aid to the sick, migrants, refugees and exiles, abandoned children and the poor. Made up of some 11,000 members in 40 countries and some 70,000 full-time volunteers, the Order, which had diplomatic representation at the ambassadorial level in 76 States, provided assistance in some 100 countries. Therefore, it was particularly aware of international efforts to eradicate poverty and supported United Nations activities in that sphere. It was inconceivable that, at the end of the twentieth century, many human beings lived in conditions that did not allow them even a minimum of dignity, when humanity had the financial and organizational means at its disposal to resolve that serious problem. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta wished to cooperate with international institutions and countries in that field and to coordinate some of its activities in assistance to the poor with United Nations activities.

5. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the persistence of extreme poverty in the modern world was scandalous. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II had pointed out at the World Food Summit in November 1996, the contrasts between poverty and wealth were intolerable for humanity. His delegation had consistently stated in the United Nations that the vision of development must be centred on the human person. The World Summit for Social Development had focused on the eradication of poverty, and

commitments had been made to establish policies and strategies designed to respond to the problem of extreme poverty, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.

6. A vision of development centred on the human person no longer allowed any separation between economic, human or social development and care for the environment. Sustainable development must involve a vision of the economy in which the needs of all were met, and the eradication of poverty must become an essential part of all economic theory. Long-term, sustainable policies for the elimination of poverty must be multidimensional and integrated, aimed at guaranteeing the basic needs of all. As stated in the Copenhagen Declaration, although primary responsibility in that area belonged to national Governments, that task could not be successfully achieved without the collective commitment and efforts of the international community.

7. Significant changes had taken place, however, in the understanding of international development cooperation. Foreign direct investment had grown, but the amount of official development assistance had stagnated or even decreased, and there were no prospects for a significant increase in the near future. In that respect, the growing importance of direct investment did not diminish the importance of official development assistance, which alone could be effective in achieving certain goals. The international community should ask itself the extent to which the crisis in official development assistance was linked with a distancing of public opinion from the ethical imperative to eradicate poverty referred to in the Copenhagen Declaration. Currently, no nation could stand alone: isolationism was short-sighted. The concept of common responsibility for the human family applied to all nations, poor and rich alike, and the stewardship of the goods of creation, which were destined for all, was the responsibility of all.

8. The serious errors of the past in the use of official development assistance must be avoided, and waste through corruption or pursuit of the short-term interests of the donor countries must be eliminated, along with conditionalities of a political or military nature. A process of dialogue between donor and recipient must be established so that the true development priorities of the people concerned could be identified. Those living in poverty, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged must be involved in the design, evaluation and execution of development programmes, to ensure that such programmes benefited those who required them most. Development and humanitarian assistance programmes must not be allowed to become businesses dominated by the interests of a new "development elite".

9. Official development assistance must first be assigned to human resources development, through education for all, especially for girls, and through the strengthening of basic health infrastructure, such as safe drinking water, sanitation and combating infectious diseases. A parallel goal of official development assistance should be the fostering of social infrastructure, including public services, transparent public administration, and access to credit, technology, knowledge and information. Special importance should be placed on sustainable rural development.

10. The current crisis in official development assistance could not be resolved, however, simply by rationalization and better use of current falling resources. The awareness of the importance of international solidarity must be reawakened.

11. **Ms. Ramiro-Lopez** (the Philippines) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. In order for countries to have a real chance to eradicate poverty, they must achieve sustained economic growth, accompanied by increased public expenditure in the social sector, which could take place only in an expanding national economy. Therefore, it was necessary to create a favourable economic environment that would allow countries with a high incidence of poverty to grow and prosper. The lack of a durable solution to the debt problem, the risks and costs of volatility in financial markets, the limited access of developing countries to resources, imbalances in trade liberalization and the continuing decline in official development assistance were some of the factors working against the creation of such an environment. Therefore, specific measures must be adopted, with definite time limits and objectives, in areas of critical importance, in order to create favourable external conditions for the eradication of poverty.

12. Her Government, aware that the primary responsibility in combating poverty lay with Governments, had established as an integral part of its national development plan a strategy to promote the participation of non-governmental organizations and grass-roots groups. At the helm of that strategy was a Presidential Commission to Fight Poverty, a high-level oversight body to coordinate all Government programmes and projects in that area.

13. The incidence of poverty was comparatively lower in Southeast Asia than in other regions of the developing world; nevertheless, eradicating poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. At

the subregional level, under ASEAN auspices a Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Committee had been established. The ASEAN countries had held a ministerial meeting on rural development and poverty eradication in October at Kuala Lumpur, preceded by a high-level meeting of all ASEAN countries and Cambodia. Their objective had been to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience in the field.

14. Her delegation commended United Nations system-wide initiatives to ensure coordinated follow-up to the commitments made as a result of the international conferences held during the 1990s, as well as the specific measures on poverty eradication adopted by various United Nations bodies, organizations, funds and programmes.

15. **Mr. Birouk** (Algeria) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The eradication of poverty was the foundation for the protection and preservation of humanity's social and economic rights; if those rights were not respected, all others were useless. The major international conferences held under United Nations auspices over the past six years had underlined the priority assigned to eradicating the poverty affecting a quarter of humanity, mainly in the developing countries. The operational strategy approved at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen was based at the national level on more equitable income distribution, greater integration of marginalized groups, especially women, in the production system, and access by all sectors of society to such basic social services as education, health care, jobs and livelihoods. At the international level, the strengthening of international cooperation had been proposed, especially through the United Nations system. In other words, it was recognized that national efforts were insufficient in themselves to achieve United Nations objectives for poverty eradication. The support of the international community remained essential in order to put an end to that universal evil.

16. The elimination of poverty was one of the principle commitments of many organs of the United Nations system, in particular UNDP, which allocated major amounts of money annually to that endeavour, with encouraging results. However, the guiding philosophy of many initiatives to combat poverty undertaken within the United Nations was not entirely in keeping with the objective of permanently eliminating that scourge. The proposed "cure" could not replace global efforts to promote economic and social development. In fact, unless official development assistance commitments were fully met, and without a substantial and significant debt reduction for the countries of the South, better balance in trade relations and in particular, broader and more equitable access for the products of developing countries to international markets, or in other words, without vigourous measures supported by clear and sustained international will, poverty would continue to spread. Special attention should be paid to the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and recommendations for the rest of the Decade (A/52/573).

17. Algeria devoted a major share of its resources to the social sector, in compliance with the 20/20 initiative, and welcomed the results of the World Summit on Micro-credit held in Washington. Microcredit was a powerful instrument of social emancipation in the developing countries, especially for women.

18. *Mr. Abdellatif (Egypt), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

19. **Mr. Shaffer** (International Labour Organization) said that, like other United Nations bodies, the International Labour Organization (ILO) believed that the eradication of poverty was essential for achieving the global objectives of sustainable development, peace and security. As an organization dedicated to the promotion of social justice through full employment and the improvement of working conditions, ILO had participated in the fight against poverty since its inception. From the organization's standpoint, access to remunerative and productive employment was a key factor in alleviating poverty, since it offered poor and disadvantaged groups an opportunity to earn income and purchase the goods and services which they needed in order to improve their lives. In that context, it was important to stress the qualitative aspects of employment, since only access to productive, remunerative and secure employment could have a significant impact on poverty.

20. On the basis of its studies and activities, ILO had concluded that the expansion of productive employment opportunities required various actions of a regulatory nature and the right combination of macroeconomic and sectoral policies, labour-market policies, policies aimed at combating the exclusion of certain groups from the labour market and labour regulations to protect the rights of workers and improve their employment and working conditions.

21. With regard to the specific poverty eradication activities of ILO, he drew attention to its role as the coordinating body of the Administrative Committee on Coordination task force on employment and sustainable livelihoods, which carried out broad studies of employment policies in seven countries. In addition, the ILO International Institute for Labour Studies had conducted a major research project on the modalities and causes of social exclusion. The

main aim of those studies had been to design policies and programmes to promote integration as an important element of the strategies for combating poverty.

22. At the 1996 session of the International Labour Conference, a broad consensus had been reached among representatives of Governments, workers' organizations and employers' organizations in developed countries, countries with transitional economies and developing countries on the conclusions of the Conference, which had reaffirmed the goal of full, productive and freely chosen employment and defined a regulatory framework to guide the development policies of the Governments of ILO member States. In addition, the Conference had reaffirmed the direct link between employment and the fight against poverty and the need to integrate employment issues into overall economic policies in order to achieve sustainable development. It had also emphasized that market reforms were essential for achieving sustainable production and an expansion of employment that would have lasting effects on poverty, and had stressed the need to adopt special measures to enable poor and disadvantaged groups to benefit from such reforms.

23. The ILO field offices, particularly the multidisciplinary teams, were responsible for supervising the implementation of the conclusions of conferences and committees of ILO and the United Nations system. The teams had advised the Governments of various countries on the design of strategies and policies for combating poverty. Among the measures which they had recommended were the creation of micro-enterprises and small enterprises, the development of the informal sector and vocational training.

24. **Mr. Sfeir-Younis** (World Bank) said that while significant progress had been made in reducing poverty, many people still did not enjoy the fruits of such success. While traditional social indicators in general showed clear signs of improvement, the disparities between urban and rural areas and between skilled and unskilled workers were growing. In many countries, the poorest 10 per cent of the population received less than 1 per cent of the income, while the richest 20 per cent enjoyed over half of the income. In order to minimize such disparities and improve living standards, it was necessary to promote equitable access to the economic and social benefits of development. The World Bank fully supported the position that the eradication of poverty was the central goal of development.

25. Tackling poverty and social exclusion called for the adoption of a multifaceted strategy whose main components were the restoration of growth and investment, the pursuit of a growth path that expanded opportunities for poor people, the expansion of basic social and economic services and the participation of poor communities in the design and implementation of development strategies and projects. In the Bank's view, two other factors were crucially important: policy and institutional reforms to ensure quality services for the poor, and diagnosis of the constraints affecting poor people, both in the domain of economic opportunity and in social services.

26. The Bank's experience showed that programmes targeted to poor people should take into account four key lessons. The involvement of the poor must be encouraged by keeping the cost of participation low; the cost of administering the programmes must be contained in order to ensure their sustainability; specific geographical targets must be set in order to improve programme effectiveness; and all costs inherent in the proposed activities must be considered fully.

27. **Mr. Prieto** (Venezuela) endorsed the statements made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, speaking as Chairman of the Group of 77, and by the representative of Paraguay, speaking as Coordinator of the Rio Group. As noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, poverty in the developing countries had declined in relative terms, but had increased in absolute terms. In general, while the economic performance of the developing countries had improved, poverty remained widespread and a number of problems persisted, such as decreased calorie consumption, higher mortality and morbidity, declining school enrolment and the spread of diseases, such as malaria, cholera, tuberculosis and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

28. While some minor progress had been noted in the implementation of Agenda 21, poverty levels had risen, environmental degradation had accelerated and the gap between developed and developing countries was widening. The developed countries must fulfil their commitment to channel additional financial resources to the developing countries, so as to provide the necessary technical assistance and facilitate the transfer of appropriate technologies.

29. His delegation believed that in order to eradicate poverty, it was of crucial importance to fulfil the commitments undertaken at the Cairo Conference, the World Summit for Social Development, the Rio Summit and the Food Summit, and it reaffirmed that economic, social and environmental aspects must be integrated fully into actions aimed at achieving sustainable development and poverty eradication. In addition, in order to alleviate poverty, the population must be involved in economic and development strategies.

30. His delegation expressed its solidarity with people in all countries who were living in poverty, and it reaffirmed that the causes of poverty must be addressed in the context of sectoral strategies linked to the environment, food security, population and migration, health, housing, human resources development, sanitation and productive employment. In view of the characteristics of poverty, its eradication must be the focus of a global and multisectoral approach, which called for coordinated action among the organizations of the United Nations system, the multilateral financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the public at large.

31. **Mr. Hamad** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that UNESCO believed that any strategy aimed at the eradication of poverty must go beyond monetary and economic concerns to address poverty as a manifestation of social marginalization, taking into account numerous indicators and not only those relating to income and consumption. UNESCO poverty eradication measures focused on human resources development and capacity-building, mainly through education and training in order to facilitate access to the job market. A considerable investment must be made in education, since it was not only a means of acquiring knowledge but it also broadened horizons and promoted the participation of the poor as citizens.

32. In its strategies, UNESCO stressed the need to design and implement educational, scientific, technological, cultural and communications programmes, and programmes for the training of experts in those areas, as well as the need to establish research infrastructure. UNESCO cooperated closely with the funds and programmes of the United Nations system and with other bodies to promote the concept of micro-financing for the poor. Poverty eradication required the entire system, under the supervision of the Economic and Social Council and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, to display the firm will to share all available resources in order to assist Member States in the constant development of their plans and strategies.

33. **Ms. Rose** (World Health Organization) said that healthy people were an essential prerequisite for the eradication of poverty. WHO had comprehensive technical cooperation programmes in all the developing countries and lent special support to the least developed countries in order to improve the health of those population groups in greatest need. Health systems which guaranteed adequate health care and the control of communicable diseases were of great importance. Thus, for example, as a result of the activities carried out with assistance from WHO, poliomyelitis was expected to be eradicated in all countries by the end of the century. The control of onchocerciasis or river blindness had not only relieved people's suffering but had also freed thousands of hectares of arable land in a number of West African countries; the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, at their meeting in Harare in June, had also voiced their strong support for the malaria control programme. The Expanded Programme on Immunization today covered 80 per cent of children under five years of age and efforts were being redoubled to reach the poorest people in rural and urban areas.

34. HIV/AIDS was continuing to spread and becoming endemic in some parts of the world. There was as yet no cure; the only available weapon to control the disease was prevention, through information and education activities, and the treatment of other diseases in infected persons to enable them to resist the virus more easily. Vigorous action in communities, supported by Governments and in collaboration with employers, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in the field, was of crucial importance.

35. The general improvement of the health status of the poor required proper intersectoral coordination. WHO advocated a common perspective and shared analysis of poverty and its causes and consequences, both in individual countries and at the international level. Establishing poverty eradication indicators, including health status measurements, would greatly facilitate closer involvement by WHO in the monitoring of poverty trends and the adoption of a more integrated approach to poverty assessment. In that context, in 1995 WHO had launched a series of consultations on poverty and health with representatives of the health professions, Governments, national and international non-governmental organizations and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Thus far, three follow-up meetings and several other conferences had been held.

36. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in poverty eradication activities was one of the functions of the WHO Global Commission on Women's Health, which helped to increase awareness among policy makers and advocated the promotion of women's health as a component of national development policies and plans. During the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission had been called on to guide other United Nations agencies in selecting priorities for the adoption of measures relating to women's health. The coordinated work of the various agencies focused on three basic aspects: the promotion of the health of girls and women through schools, violence against women, and maternal morbidity and mortality.

37. WHO would continue to make every effort to achieve the aims and objectives of the First Decade for the Eradication of Poverty in cooperation with its partners both within and outside the United Nations system, particularly regional and subregional organizations. To that end, priority would continue to be given to the least developed countries and the neediest groups.

38. **Mr. Al-Mulla** (Kuwait) said that, on the threshold of the twenty-first century and despite technological advances and encouraging growth in the world economy, the existence of more than 1 billion victims of the scourge of poverty was an enormous human tragedy with damaging consequences, which, every year, caused the death of 13 million children – and there were no promising signs that the nightmare would end. The eradication of poverty required equal economic opportunities that would make it possible for all to have a means of subsistence. The development efforts of the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, must be supported. To that end, the developed and donor countries must honour their commitments regarding financial and technical assistance so that the developing countries could utilize their resources effectively to move closer to realizing the objective of genuine and sustainable development.

39. Since the attainment of independence in 1961, the Government and the people of Kuwait had set out to assist in the eradication of poverty and ease the suffering of human beings in various parts of the world. On 31 December 1961, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, with a current capital of US$ 6.6 billion, had been created with the aim of helping Arab countries and other developing countries to develop their economies by providing them with the necessary credit facilities and technical assistance to implement their development plans. Between 1973 and 1990, the Fund had provided development assistance in the amount of $18.6 billion.

40. In 1990, Kuwait had been invaded by Iraq and the country's economic structure had been devastated as a consequence. However, following rapid reconstruction, Kuwait had resumed its assistance activities to all those in need of help, in South-East Asia and the Pacific, in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the national level, numerous charitable organizations and benevolent societies provided medical and material assistance to the poor and needy.

41. His delegation urgently appealed to donor countries and the whole world to mobilize their efforts swiftly and purposefully in order to overcome that terrible scourge. Now, more than ever, it was important to reaffirm the international community's determination to cooperate unceasingly with a view to eradicating poverty. It was meaningless to make speeches, hold conferences and symposia and formulate programmes and plans if all that was not coupled with a sincere desire to reduce the inequalities between rich and poor, which were increasing daily.

42. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil) expressed his delegation's unqualified support for the statements delivered on agenda item 97 (f) by the delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by the delegation of Uruguay, on behalf of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR). Brazil was fully committed to the goals and objectives of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty. In recent years, it had already achieved some progress in that area, but was still confronted by enormous problems.

43. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in a recent study, had stressed that the economic reforms carried out in the countries of the region had brought about significant advances in macroeconomic stability and renewed growth. As a result of those efforts, absolute poverty had been significantly reduced and living conditions for the poor improved, but a persistent "equity gap" in income distribution still prevailed. That was certainly very much the case in Brazil; nevertheless, some encouraging indicators revealed that the inequality was at last beginning to be reduced.

44. Price stabilization was one of the major achievements of his Government's macroeconomic programme, and one of the most visible benefits to poor families. Persistent growth and positive trends in income distribution had led to considerable advances in poverty alleviation. Since 1994, the national poverty rate had declined from 33.4 per cent to 25.1 per cent. That figure was still high, but it was an encouraging sign that the mix of macroeconomic and social policies was working. Those positive trends had also been reflected in increased demand for consumer goods, particularly among households with the lowest incomes.

45. The macroeconomic stabilization programme had been accompanied by a significant increase in social expenditure by the federal Government, which had risen by 25 per cent from 1994 to 1996. Special emphasis had been placed on programmes designed to respond to the needs of lower-income families. In that context, he drew attention to the "Community in Solidarity" ("Comunidade Solidaria") programme, which was a good example of the advantages of building partnerships between Government and civil society in the common struggle against poverty and social exclusion. The programme had two basic objectives: to

improve the effectiveness of Government spending and to promote better coordination and closer collaboration between Government and civil society. The programme was directed to areas with the highest poverty indicators and consisted of a package of poverty alleviation projects in six main areas: infant mortality reduction; food and nutrition; primary education; basic sanitation and urban development; rural development; professional training and income generation.

46. At the regional level, ECLAC had organized the first regional follow-up conference to the World Social Summit in April 1997 at Sao Paulo. On that occasion, Latin American and Caribbean countries had jointly decided to establish a regional database of successful social projects and had renewed their commitments to give priority to poverty eradication and social issues in regional and national agendas, to incorporate social equity into economic growth, and to strengthen the collaboration between the Government and all sectors of civil society.

47. **Mr. Kaid** (Yemen) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development must be fulfilled. Poverty was not just a national issue, but a humanitarian problem that could arise in any part of the world. It could have an impact in many areas, including education, health care and the environment. United Nations and World Bank programmes, along with the important observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, were commendable initiatives to combat poverty.

48. Among the most important issues of concern to the international community were debt and the problems arising from it. Thus far, no effective solution had been found, primarily because poverty and debt formed a vicious circle. There could be no development without financial resources, but there could be no financing unless debt was addressed; there could be no development without transfer of technology, but no trade unless protectionism was lifted. Consequently, it was urgent that the international community should examine those issues seriously in order to find a solution. The most highly indebted countries faced many problems, which had recently been compounded by the negative effects of globalization. His Government was aware of the changes which had taken place in the world, and had taken bold steps to implement the first stages of an economic and administrative reform which had been well received by financial institutions and by the donor conference held in Belgium. His Government called on the international financial institutions to continue their efforts to help the country. He took note of the statement by the Secretary-General to the Microcredit Summit held in Washington, D.C. in which he had stated that, if humanity wished to live in a world where peace, security and stability reigned, it must meet the social and economic needs of the world's people.

49. **Mr. Biaou** (Benin) said that his Government was pleased that it had been able to participate actively in the reaching of consensus on the initiatives for the eradication of poverty which had been adopted by the United Nations system since the Rio Conference. Combating poverty should continue to be one of the main priorities of the United Nations until absolute poverty was eliminated in all countries. In addition to its contribution to activities at the international level, Benin had made major efforts at the national level to implement specific poverty eradication measures. In 1995, the Government had established a body to oversee the effective implementation of poverty eradication activities and projects at the local level. In 1996, it had adopted a national employment programme, one of the most important tools for combating poverty at the national level. Job creation in the production sector was an elusive target for all Governments; however, every effort must be made to find viable solutions in keeping with the reality of each country.

50. In October 1997, Benin had hosted an international symposium on the "minimum social commons", the package of goods and services needed in order for a community to control its own destiny and participate fully in national development. That concept, whose content would be enhanced as the country continued to develop, would initially be limited to four essential components: food security; basic education; access to primary health care services; and capacity-building in income generation. In order to achieve social well-being, people living in poverty, local groups, grass-roots organizations and families organized into community units would be the main agents of development and would progressively assume management of their affairs, while the Government of Benin would increasingly take on the role of facilitator, creating the necessary conditions for private initiative. Participants in the symposium had included such United Nations funds and programmes as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The concept of the minimum social commons and the objectives of the symposium were also in line with the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development and the Oslo Consensus on the implementation of the 20/20 initiative.

51. **Mr. Lemaresquier** (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the eradication of absolute poverty remained among the most important tasks of the international community. Despite considerable social progress in recent decades, an ever-increasing number of people were currently living in absolute poverty, at a time when the world had achieved an unprecedented level of material prosperity and technological advancement. That situation not only offended human dignity and violated the basic human rights of more than one fifth of the world's population, but it also undermined economic growth and jeopardized peace, democracy and security. Fifty years earlier, the Charter of the United Nations had affirmed that there could be no lasting peace without social progress. UNDP believed that eradicating extreme poverty was a realistic goal that could be achieved in the early decades of the twenty-first century through a concerted effort of all actors at the national level and with the determined support of the international community.

52. Economic growth alone was insufficient to eliminate poverty. The eradication of poverty called for profound policy and institutional changes that would allow poor people to contribute to and benefit from economic growth; expand their access to productive resources, social services and basic infrastructure, as well as to key markets and institutions, knowledge, technology and information; and promote income generation and sustainable livelihoods. Both women and men, together with all organized sectors of civil society, should take part in that process.

53. UNDP strongly supported the goals of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the World Summit for Social Development and the other global conferences on social issues which the United Nations had sponsored during the 1990s. In line with those objectives, UNDP was assisting more than 80 countries in improving data collection and formulating national strategies for poverty eradication. Its country cooperation frameworks focused on poverty reduction and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods. With support from UNDP, more than 100 countries were preparing national human development reports in which poverty was one of the central themes.

54. Nonetheless, as the participants in the World Summit for Social Development had recognized, it would be difficult to eradicate poverty in the absence of an enabling international environment that offered opportunities for participation to all developing countries, especially those in Africa and least developed countries. While economic globalization had bound some economies closely together, it had also resulted in the further marginalization of entire regions and had widened the gap between rich and poor in many countries. Ways must be found to increase the benefits of globalization for developing countries. Two more elements that would underpin the poverty eradication strategies of national Governments were alleviation of the external debt burden and an increase in official development assistance. UNDP welcomed the HIPC (heavily indebted, poor countries) initiative, and called upon all parties to renew their efforts to ensure that the debt problem did not continue to constrain the development prospects of poor countries. In addition, it supported the goals of the 20/20 initiative and called for an increase in the amount of resources which bilateral and multilateral agencies devoted to programmes for poverty eradication and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods.

55. Since resources for development cooperation were increasingly scarce, no one could afford to act alone. The goal of poverty eradication should prompt all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to join forces in the framework of the United Nations Development Group and in line with the proposals for reforming the Organization.

56. **Mr. Al-Khalifa** (Bahrain) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Political, economic and social considerations made it urgent to eliminate poverty, and all States bore equal responsibility for helping to remedy the causes of poverty. Bahrain, partly as a result of its trade surplus in 1996, had been able to adopt a series of anti-poverty measures. In order to ensure that development plans yielded good results, the Government had established an open dialogue between government authorities and the citizenry, based on the precepts and beliefs of Islamic culture. It was also promoting the advancement of women to enable them to take part in the development process; women enjoyed complete freedom in the labour and educational systems. In addition, the Government guaranteed the right to free education and to medical care, without discrimination of any kind. The report of the World Health Organization noted that Bahrain was one of the developing countries in which the best medical services were provided. In order to ensure decent housing for the entire population, the authorities had launched a plan to increase the number of dwellings and to grant credit on favourable terms to all citizens. To guarantee the right to decent and adequately paid work, the Government had earmarked resources for training with the aim of building a skilled workforce, which would help to increase productivity. Bahrain aspired to become a regional manpower training centre. Lastly, for the purpose of diversifying sources of income, the authorities had encouraged the development of activities which were not

related to the petroleum sector, such as financial and banking services, transport and communications and tourism.

57. **Mr. A'Ala** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The participants in the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, had defined the priorities and the main instruments for eliminating poverty, specifically in the areas of education, health, hygiene and malnutrition. Despite widespread interest in the problem and the commitments which had been made, the Secretary-General's report (A/52/573) contained figures from the World Bank indicating that the absolute number of poor people had increased. The report also identified the key elements on which time-bound national poverty reduction strategies should focus. International cooperation should complement the measures taken at the national level. However, official development assistance continued to decline, despite its importance for the improvement of infrastructure and services and for agricultural development in developing countries, particularly low-income countries. It would also be appropriate to adopt global measures to alleviate the burden of external debt and debt servicing. Thus far, world economic growth had not translated into new jobs or reduced poverty; on the contrary, the gap between North and South had widened at an alarming rate.

58. In view of its geography and climate and its high population growth rate, the Syrian Arab Republic gave priority to the promotion of agriculture and the development of human resources. Efforts were being made to improve standards of living and economic performance and to promote sustainable development in rural areas through the optimum use of financial and natural resources. Considerable progress had been made in the areas of education and health and in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. Thanks to the efforts it had made to date, the Syrian Arab Republic had been classified among the top 10 performers in human development for the period from 1960 to 1992, according to the *Human Development Report 1994*. In addition, the Government encouraged the full participation of women in the country's sustainable development efforts. In cooperation with UNDP and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the authorities were identifying and analysing the causes of poverty with a view to designing strategies and programmes for sustainable development and poverty eradication. As the General Assembly had affirmed in its resolution 51/178, eradicating poverty was an ethical, social, political and economic imperative.

59. **Mr. Langmore** (Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development) said that the Second Committee's discussions had shown that there was a firm national and international commitment to the eradication of poverty, that that process had an international dimension and that the international community should coordinate its aid to countries. The wealth of information which had been provided on national programmes and initiatives was important because of the lessons that could be drawn from each country's individual experiences. It was clear that the process begun at the Copenhagen Summit would succeed only if anti-poverty activities were carried out consistently and systematically.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.